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The literature of the beat generation: a study in attitudes

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THE LITERATURE OF THE BEAT GENERATION:
A STUDY IN ATTITUDES

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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PREFACE

Of the many concepts of a nation that have been advanced, one is particularly applicable to the nature of this thesis. It has been stated by Meredith Garfield that "territory is but the body of a nation. The people who inhabit its hills and vales are its life, its soul, its spirit." Because of the fact that literature is not merely a reflection, but a reproduction of the minds of a people, a study of major literary productions reveals those attitudes and/or values that are characteristic of certain facets of a nation. In America, especially, with her freedom of press, attitudes and values that are revealed through literature have their significance, for these help to determine the destiny of or direction in which our people move.

The particular segment of our nation with which this thesis is concerned is the Beat Generation, which was labeled by this title as a result of a phrase coined by Jack Kerouac, a former Columbia University student and the foremost spokesman of the group. Kerouac states that the Beat Generation has evolved "out of king kong and krazy kat and old american whoopie,"¹ and out of the America that was "invested with wild self-believing individuality."² Though such an America began to disappear around the end of World War II, it emerged again near 1944 and took shape

² Ibid., p. 32.
around 1948, when

...the hipsters or beatsters, were divided into cool and hot. Much of the misunderstanding about hipsters and the Beat Generation in general today derives from the fact that there are two distinct styles of hipsterism: the cool today is your bearded laconic sage, or schlém, before a hardly touched beer in a beatnik dive, whose girls say nothing and wear black; the "hot" today is the crazy talkative shining eyed (often innocent and open-hearted) nut who runs from bar to bar, pad to pad looking for everybody, shouting, restless, lushy, trying to "make it" with the subterranean beatniks who ignore him.  

Such are the general or somewhat external characteristics of the Generation, given by the foremost of the beatniks. But, there are more profound characteristics of the group, and it is these which threaten even the basic concepts upon which our nation was founded. These attitudes mark a revolution in American manners. Because of the fact that the Beat Generation is a secluded generation, its basic concepts or attitudes are disseminated chiefly through literature, which reflects defeat and homelessness. This literature is of importance, for never before has there been such serious advocation of any mores that are so contradictory to the established American way of life.

One general theme runs through this new literature - "that man has been transformed from a creative, spontaneous, living being into an automaton made to function in a compulsive drama of success, the meaning of which he can never grasp." The motivation of the literature is the urge to find the true self, the naked self, the only self. Unlike its counterpart in England, the Angry Young Men, the Beat Generation has created a subterranean world in which to return to the primal unit by any means

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1 Ibid., p. 42.

possible, but the end rather than the means is of significance. This unlimited search for "self" represents a significant adaptation to life in the mid-twentieth century, and may become the vantage point of a moral revolution which will cause man to place less emphasis upon history and more upon experience.

The purpose of this thesis is (1) to examine the literature of the Beat Generation in order to determine the basic attitudes that are reflected and (2) to give an estimation of the implications of these attitudes in relation to American society. An attempt is made to answer such questions as: what societal factors account for the philosophic, religious, political, and social attitudes of the Beat Generation? How are these factors revealed in the literature? What major influences are revealed in this literature in re basic attitudes and styles? How successful are the writers of the Beat Generation?

Since this is a movement that is current, and because of its nature, much literature is available for referent purposes. Of extreme importance in writing this thesis was Lawrence Lipton's The Holy Barbarians, a book which presents the complete story of the beatniks. This book is recommended to all who are interested in obtaining first hand information of the Generation. In the line of novels, those most highly recommended are those of Jack Kerouac, the "Homer" of the beatniks.

The writer is indebted to Doctor Thomas D. Jarrett, under whose supervision this thesis was written. On February 17, 1959, the School of Library Service, Atlanta University, presented Doctor Jarrett in a public book review of The Beat Generation and The Angry Young Men. It was his review that inspired further investigation in this area of American literature.
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CHAPTER I

SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Berdan states in his *Early Tudor Poetry* that "that which separates people far more than geographical boundaries or 'the unplumbed, salt, estranging sea,' is the basic philosophy that underlies their national life, the unwritten assumptions that, like axioms in geometry, are accepted without the need of proof."¹ On the intra-national level, this belief can be applied to account for the various religious, political, and social groups that have been and are being formed over the years. Such certainly accounts for the formation of the Beat Generation, for this group of young men and women is bound together among themselves and is separated from our mass culture by the ideas or beliefs or attitudes that it holds. On the other hand, this group is not separated from our mass culture in that those attitudes that characterize it are a result of environmental influences, and may be considered as an outgrowth of the American way of life.

This group of rebels with a cause known as the Beat Generation has been identified in many instances with the Lost Generation of the 1920's, a group of expatriate Americans who, out of a sense of exile, created a new literature, just as we are witnessing in the 1950's. But, basically, there is a difference between the two groups. The Beat Generation, broadly speaking, differs from the Lost Generation of the roaring twenties in that

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it lacks the feeling of bereavement which made the exploits of the latter symbolic actions. John Clellon Holmes differentiates the two groups in this manner:

The repeated inventory of shattered ideals, and the laments about the mud in moral currents, which so obsessed the Lost Generation, does not concern our young people today /the Beat Generation/, for they were brought up in these ruins. Their excursions take place out of curiosity rather than disillusionment.

The absence of personal and social values is to them, not a revolution shaking the ground beneath them, but a problem demanding a day to day solution. How to live seems to them more crucial than why. Unlike the Lost Generation, which was occupied with the loss of faith, the Beat Generation is becoming more and more occupied with the need for it. As such, it is a disturbing illustration of Voltaire's old joke: "If there were no God, it would be necessary to invent Him." Not content to bemoan His absence, they are busily and haphazardly investing totems for Him on all sides.1

The Lost Generation had its origin in an America that had undergone a transformation during the post-war years of the 1920's. There was a shattering of standards and beliefs which had served as a stabilizing force for youth. The Beat Generation had its origin in an America that had undergone no immediate transformation, but one which reflected to a great extent many pseudo-standards and beliefs. The Beats could be classified as intellectual or moral delinquents, "the natural product of an unborn middle class that has lost its nerve, its sense of reality, its creative strength, its belief in the future,"2 of a people who are gradually substituting "automation for participation, symbols for meaning."3

In such an atmosphere, perhaps the "beat" way of life is the only means of


3 Ibid.
adjustment. Such is certainly the attitude of those who identify themselves with the Beat Generation.

The term "beat" implies a "rawness of the nerve," rather than weariness, and characterizes a group that is not so much "filled up to here" as emptied out—a group whose state of mind has been stripped of all essentials, leaving it receptive to everything around it, but impatient with trivial abstractions. Holmes says that to be "beat" means to be at the bottom of your personality looking up. The group differs from the juvenile delinquent in that the former is actually "on a quest, and the specific object of the quest is spiritual."^1 Kerouac states that they are basically "a religious generation. This includes anyone from 15 to 55 who digs everything. We're not Bohemian, remember. Beat means beatitude not beat up. You feel this. You feel it in a beat in jazz--real cool jazz or a good gutty rock number."^2

Perhaps a consideration of the general atmosphere out of which the generation has sprung will account for and justify the basic attitudes which characterize the movement. It seems quite paradoxical that in an age such as ours—an age of atomic energy, an age of great scientific and technological advances, an age in which man has to do the least amount of work, thus allowing for more leisure and relaxation—men find themselves living in a period of pressure, of impatience, of anxiety, and of despair. Paradoxical though it may seem, such is true. As a result of the many scientific and technological advances of the past decade, man has created

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^2 Ibid.
the most pervasive fact in our history: "One must learn to breathe, eat, make love in its presence; it is a part of every living consciousness." Consequently, there is a gradual erosion of the pseudo-normalcy which is characteristic of the manner in which men go about their daily activities; there is a growing awareness of the nothingness of man and the world in which he lives. Amid this complex situation, young Americans are asking, Should a man live a slave to illusions he knows to be untrue? Or should he tear down the front that masks itself as his dignity and thereby enter into an existence wherein, through acceptance of his loneness and of the ever-present possibility of sudden death, he can find the potential for freedom and authentic identity?

The Beat Generation has answered the final question in the affirmative, choosing to live in the present. They accept life as a continuing state of anxiety; they see man in a constant search for meaning, regardless of the fact that the rejection of insipidity may lead to danger.

Even though all generations may feel that theirs is the worst of all possible worlds, Holmes feels that the Beat Generation probably has more claim to the feeling than any that have come before it.

The historical climate that formed its attitudes was violent, and it did as much violence to ideas as it did to the men who believed them. One does not have to be consciously aware of such destruction to feel it. Conventional notions of public and private morality have been steadily atrophied in the last ten or fifteen years by the exposure of treason in government, corruption in labor and business, and scandal among the mighty of Broadway and Hollywood. The political faith which sometimes seems to justify slaughter have become steadily less appealing as slaughter has reached proportions that stagger even the mathematical mind.

1 Feldman and Gartenberg, _op. cit._, p. 9.

2 _Ibid._, p. 10.

The Beat Generation is the first in history that has grown up with peacetime military training as a fully accepted fact of life; with the catch phrases of psychiatry regarded as intellectual pabulum, encouraging man to feel that he is not the final yardstick of the human soul; with the possibility of the nuclear destruction of the world as the final answer to all questions.¹ How does the individual fit into such a society? How is he to be cognizant of his individuality and essence among a mass of machines which constantly deprive him the chance to make use of his manual ability? How is he to feel secure living in constant fear of death inflicted by the results of his own creation? The inability of the Beat Generation to find answers to questions such as these has led to a general feeling of defeat. Consequently, the generation is always occupied with the production of answers to a single question: how are we to live? The answers to this question are conceived in personal terms, coming out of "the dark night of the individual soul."² Living in the collective bad conditions of the depression, the collective uprooting of a global war, there is a tendency to avoid all collectivism, and to emphasize instinctive individuality.

"It's like this, man, we need more awareness of the I..."³

The constant search for awareness of the "I" is made in terms of the present only. The past and future have lost their meaning—only the present moment can be possessed, and only the present affords an opportunity for meaningful participation.

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Lawrence Lipton, The Holy Barbarians (New York, 1959), p. 27.
Not capable of the act of faith required by belief in tomorrow, the Beat Man values relationships only as they tend to reveal the truth of his present existence. ...All of his contacts are immediate and intense. He has no future which rests on a connection with some person or group. Therefore no other human being can be so important to him outside of the moment, and his relationships with others take on the form of a dialogue with a shifting _dramatis personae_, a dialogue always carried on in the present.\(^1\)

Any attempt at life in the present only has a tendency to lead one in many directions, without any stabilizing force. This is seen in the mores of the Beat Generation as reflected in most of the literature, for the aim of each beatnik character is to live! live! live! or, in the terms of Kerouac, go! go! go! In _On The Road_, the characters are constantly racing across the country without any purpose other than finding kicks.

"We're going to L.A."
"What are you going to do there?"
"Hell, we don't know. Who cares?"\(^2\)

Life, says the Beat Man, should be lived without thinking ahead more than half an hour. "Now is the time. This is the only moment we have, now. Right at this split second. Past, present and future all in one."\(^3\)

Not only is there a rejection of the past and future, but also a rejection of the mores of the Square, "anybody who has been conned by society. Anybody who is not existential."\(^4\) Conforming to standards set by the middle-class tends to stifle the development of the "I". The fact that these standards are many times pseudo-standards makes the idea even more abhorrent, so they decide to turn against "the narcotic tabocca haze

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of Capitalism" (Allen Ginsberg), and the "ruins of bourgeois civilization" (Jack Kerouac), but, having become aroused, the Beats tend to go on to indict all restraints. They have withdrawn from the

...increasingly meaningless rat race rigged up by and for the Squares --those who played it safe, who stuck to their rut and their illusions and thought that their own lives embodied all decent values. Not only do the prizes to be won in this race seem worthless, but effort, that most precious of all human commodities, seems to be wasted in a game which kills time, deadens awareness and brutalizes feeling. Role-playing, an essential adjunct to making one's mark, demands one mask too many; the Beat Generation in throwing off all masks enters into the inescapable truth and squalor of its own being.1

The Beats are above commonplace mores, feeling that the wider one's experiences and experiments, the greater is one's superiority. The great search of the Square for security is to the beatnik absolute nonsense, for "whatever will be will be." The credo of the generation is simple: "the only way to come to terms with life on this planet careening to its doom is to face reality as it is, as one meets it in all moments of agony and joy."2 This the Square fails to realize, and as a result, lives in a state of false illusion. He may have apparent security, a good job--all that makes for good living--but the Beat knows that this is naught but a hoax or a deception, and strives to live in a world wherein he is alone.

The art of this type of existence is disaffiliation--disaffiliation from the institutions which establish the patterns according to which men live in a society. Podhoretz feels that this art is "a perfectly sensible reaction to a political stalemate on the international front and the absence of any deep social disturbance on the domestic front. It is both reasonable

1 Feldman and Gartenberg, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

2 Ibid., p. 12.
and justifiable to feel that there is no point in getting overly ambitious and competitive in a world where the possibility for careers in the old style is so severely limited...and where action on a heroic scale has become inconceivable and even a little ridiculous.\(^1\) Twentieth century America is a country that is virtually in a state of martial law, in which deviation from party line is treason; a party line, moreover, which lays down the law not only of politics, but in the arts as well.\(^2\) Such an America is very inhibiting to the god-impregnated individual, so one must not conform if he is to live to his capacity. The Beat Generation has rebelled against the standards and style of the educated American middle class and they have claimed to be introducing a new vigor, based on the language and experience of the mass of the people. The basis of this challenge is all the economic failures, victims of social injustice, the suffering adolescent, the juvenile delinquent, and the hipster. The goal of the new nonconformism is to redefine culture so as to include themselves. Their literature is directed to a justification of the way of life they have chosen.

The first instance of disaffiliation is the withdrawal of the Beat Generation from the obnoxious rat race of the Square—from "the nerve-shattering Stop! and Go! Hurry! and Go Slow! Step Lively! and Relax!"\(^3\) Rejection of the many luxuries that fill our markets is not difficult, for

\(^1\) Norman Podhoretz, "Where is the Beat Generation Going?" *Esquire*, L, No. 6 (December, 1958), p. 1148.


\(^3\) Lipton, op. cit., p. 1149.
America is now corrupted by the cult of moneytheism. In the eyes of Nelson Algren it is all a "neon wilderness." In the eyes of Henry Miller it is all an "air conditioned nightmare." Beneath all of this lies the fact of an economy geared to war production, a design, not for living, but for death.

Not desiring to have the least to do with the rat race, the Beat Youth have refused to enter the labor force and have accepted a life of poverty for which there is an art. This New Poverty is the disaffiliate's answer to the New Prosperity. It is based upon the conviction that it is important to make a living, but to make a life is of primary importance. Though poverty may be equated with sin, since prosperity is equated with virtue, the beatniks remind us of the fact that poverty has an honorable ancestry, mentioning St. Francis of Assissi.

The New Poverty differs from the ordinary poverty of indigence, intemperance, improvidence or failure. The difference lies in the fact that the goods offered by the Beat Generation are not valued at a high price in our society (these goods consist mainly of literary works and paintings). Though the new poverty is an art, it is also a science of survival. When it is necessary for the disaffiliate to choose manual labor, he chooses the fringe jobs in the labor market.

It is important to note that it is not that poverty is accepted without protest, but that it is preferred to a prosperity which can be bought at the price of "dog-eat-dog" success and a "bloodmoney" economy geared to production for war.¹

In communities predominantly inhabited by Beat Generation young people, there is a strong sense of communism. There is a tendency to divide among

the needy in such places. If, for any reason, a person has to move from the section, he generally leaves all his belongings behind, and these become community property. Once he returns, he will find any pad open to him, or he can live between several of his choosing. This is the traditional hospitality of the poor, one of the traditions of the Square that the Beats honor.

Emphasis is placed upon the idea of sharing in Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. Japhy Ryder, a Dharma Bum, is endowed with a "tremendous and tender sense of charity,"¹ which is reflected in his association with his fellow Bum, Raymond Smith. This practice is based upon Zen Buddhism, and is known as the Paramita of Dana, "the perfection of charity."² This perfection of charity is completely altruistic; nothing is expected in return.

"Smith you don't realize it's a privilege to practice giving presents to others." The way he did it was charming; there was nothing glittery and Christmasy about it, but almost sad, and sometimes his gifts were old beat-up things but they had the charm of usefulness and sadness of his giving.³

Not only is there the idea of sharing the inanimate, but also the animate. In *The Subterraneans* (Kerouac), the willingness to share is found even in human relationships. The character Leo Percepied is interested in the Negro Mardou Fox, and seeks information concerning her from his associates.

"...Do you know this girl, the dark one"--"Mardou?"--"That her name? Who she go with?"--"No one in particular just now, this has been an

² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p. 76.
incestuous group in its time."... 1

This attitude is in accord with the sexual promiscuity of the Beat Generation, and has its basis in the religious and philosophic concepts of the group.

The home has lost its significance among the beatniks. 2 There is a loss of respect or reverence that is customarily held by the child for his parents. Marriages, made and perpetuated in order to provide for family continuity, become form without substance. There is a general tendency to reject marriages entirely, and to live with whomever and for any length of time that is desired. Marriage is looked upon as a thing for the Squares. Sex is regarded as the only holy thing in life, though there is little apparent holiness in the sexual promiscuity of the Beats.

There is a sense of war between the youth of the Beat Generation and parenthood. Kenneth Rexroth has addressed parenthood in the following manner:

"Don't you know that across the table from you... ñ a child ñ who looks on you as an enemy who is planning to kill him in the immediate future in an extremely disagreeable way?" 3

The Beat Generation sees the entire adult world as senseless, hypocritical, and essentially beyond redemption. This attitude is further exemplified in a Beat Generation poem entitled "Upon A Certain Birthday."

Dear parents, we do not thank you,
Dear fumbling mother and father, both
Upon this miserable occasion, we


Give you offerings of respectful loathing,
So dear parents, we laugh in your faceless faces
Since you forced us into the world...

This attitude is in accord with the general attitude toward the Square. The Beat Generation wants nothing that is binding, thus prohibiting the eternal search for self.

To members of this group, marriage is considered as a "drag, the one-way ticket to oblivion," an institution strictly for the Squares. "Lovers are traitors who seek to perpetuate the whole want and drudgery of life, which would otherwise speedily reach an end." In most literature of this genre, no marriages take place, though there is expressed at least once a desire for permanent relationships.

"...although I have a hot feeling sexually and all that for her I really don't want to get any further into her not only for these reasons but finally, the big one, if I'm going to get involved with a girl now I want to be permanent like permanent and serious and long termed and I can't do that with her.

In relation to the bulk of the literature, this idea cannot be considered as typical. The Beat characters always tend to reject home life completely, and when this cannot be done they tend to divide their time equally between their homes and their beat pads. This act is most prevalent among those who are not entirely beatniks--those who are gradually becoming converts.

The following dialogue which has been extracted from a magazine that deals with Beat Generation material will serve to illustrate the general

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3 Zugsmith, op. cit., p. 23.
attitude held in re love, marriage, and home life.

"It's not good to sleep around," says a twenty year old girl who shares a small apartment with a slightly older boy on New York's east side. "But the way we live is healthy."

"You don't think you are immoral?"
"Certainly not,"... "It is perfectly natural to want to live with a man."

"Why don't you get married?"

"What is marriage? Just a piece of paper and a lot of red tape. Legalizing a thing doesn't make it any better. It just means that way a woman has a club to swing. In our relationship we have complete freedom. If we tire of one another--and this happens in marriage, don't forget--we just end it and there isn't any difficulty."

"Are you in love?"

"Love, what's that? I know an idiot woman who says that it's a sensation around the heart. She probably has indigestion and thinks it's love. The only thing I know about love is this: You're sitting in a room, any room, and you see a man. You look at one another and there it is. You want one another. First it's pure passion and then maybe you swing together. It has nothing to do with how much money he's got or what kind of house you may live in or how many furs he might buy you. It's pure and it's good."

"Suppose you become pregnant?"

"Then I'll have a baby. I'm not that different. And don't give me that old routine about family protection. My parents are married and I haven't had a single happy thought about one minute I spent with them. I see nothing wrong with having a baby and I think I could raise it as well as any simpering idiot in gingham who has an automatic washer and a twenty year mortgage."

The general reluctance toward marriage is also based on economics. Sometimes a couple shares an apartment for mere mercenary purposes, and are bound together by no other bonds. Most members of the Beat Generation are engaged in some form of art, which is often an unprofitable pursuit, and sharing apartments makes available more money for supplies.

The shock that older people feel at the sight of the Beat Generation

Stuart, op. cit., pp. 66-68.
is not so much abhorrence of the facts as it is distress at the basic attitudes which motivate their actions. The adult world views this frantic search of the Beat Generation as an indication of the lack of a single external pivot around which youth can group their observations and opinions. As a result of such an atmosphere, all of the Beats agree that the valueless abyss of modern life is unbearable. They feel that,

...the foundations of all systems, moral or social, is the indestructible unit of the single individual. This assumption may be nothing but a rebellion against a century in which this idea has fallen into disrepute. But their recognition that what sustains the individual is belief—and their growing convictions that only spiritual beliefs have any lasting validity in a world such as ours—should set their often frenzied behavior in a new light, and will certainly figure large in whatever future they may have.

Judge Learned Hand has voiced the belief that a society is in a process of dissolution where each man begins to eye his neighbor as a possible enemy, where non-conformity with the accepted creed is a mark of disaffection, where orthodoxy chokes freedom of dissent. Considering the Beat Generation in light of this belief, we must say that our country is in a state of dissolution.

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CHAPTER II

POLITICAL ATTITUDES

The Beat Generation, with its skeptical view of the Square in all positions, is apolitical, for, to them, politics is only a social lie. These young people feel that society is organized in the interest of exploiting classes, and that if this fact is recognized by citizens, the latter would cease to work and society would fall apart. Therefore, it has always been necessary for a society to be governed ideologically by a system of fraud—the social lie, according to Rexroth. That the State, for instance, taxes to provide for services is a misconception, for services are a thing that has been kidnapped from the citizen in his organic relations with others. Public utilities, sanitation, and things of this sort are not functions of the State, but rather normal functions of the community which have been invaded by the State.

Because of this social lie, the Beat boys feel that all official truth is always an official lie—nothing but an advertisement to sell merchandise. What disgusts them so much is the fact that it works: people constantly vote on things of which they have the least knowledge. The disaffiliate feels that people seldom get a chance to vote on anything that really matters, and perhaps this is just as well, since it is all lies. The attitude of the generation, then, is that of nonvoting.

2 Ibid., pp. 293-294.
This nonvoting attitude differs from the self-disenfranchisement of the large part of the eligible American citizens. This is a no confidence vote, for the Beats are contemptuous of all politicians, and their feeling about the regular voter is a mixture of pity and contempt. There is no such thing as a political solution, for these acts are nothing but "election tactics, lies, deception, trickery, mass manipulation."¹

To vote to express preference between one man or one party and another is nonsense to the Beat Generation, for, basically, all parties use the same tricks, thus effacing all choices. Democracy itself is a big shuck, "the biggest shuck of all. The only equality there can be is equality between equals."²

The right to vote is not valued mainly because "it does not present such vital issues as war and peace to the voter nor give him any voice in—or control over—such important matters as wages, price, rent...."³ It only affords the most indirect and ineffective control over taxation. Gerrymandering, conventions, legal restrictions on party representation on the ballot, boss rule, back room deals, campaign contributions—all are regarded as limitations to choices at the polls. Like democracy, politics, too, is a big shuck.

Because members of the generation classify themselves as pacifists, they are against the military services, and all industries that are maintained to feed it. These industries they call "murder incorporated."⁴

¹ Ibid., p. 49.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p. 306.
⁴ Ibid., p. 307.
There is an effort on the part of each beatnik to become a conscientious objector. They laugh at the Square's ability to conceal the killing part of the military service with all kinds of euphemisms.

You don't shoot people, you accomplish a mission or take an objective. Even the gun they give you isn't a gun, it's a weapon. Gun sounds too much like gangsters.\(^1\)

This attitude toward the military service is a further justification of the economic disaffiliation: it is wrong to support an economy geared to production for war just as it is wrong to participate in the war. And because the ballot does not afford one any control over war, the Beats refuse to go to the polls.

Any form of civil law is held in contempt by the Beat Generation; its members hold strong prejudices against policemen.

"They're against us. ...They want to let the air out of us."\(^2\)

This attitude motivates some of the beatniks to do all within their power to violate the law just for kicks. But they may be justified in their attitudes, for many times law enforcement officers perform their "duties" out of mere sadistic tendencies, or for recognition. In some instances a policeman may be fired if he does not make at least one arrest per month.\(^3\)

It is a general tendency of policement to frighten men into obedience and in turn to boost their own ego. They glory in the number of arrests they make and in the amount of brutality that they can inflict upon the victims.

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 114.

\(^2\) Zugsmith, op. cit., p. 126.

\(^3\) Jack Kerouac, On The Road (New York, 1957), p. 54.
"You should have been here about two months ago when me and Sledge... arrested a drunk in Barrick G. Boy, you should have seen the blood fly. I'll take you over there tonight and show you the blood stains on the wall. We had him bouncing from one wall to another. First Sledge hit him, and then me, and then he subsided and went quietly.

The general attitude held by the generation toward the civil law enforcement officers may be summarized by this excerpt from On The Road.

The American police are involved in psychological warfare against those Americans who don't frighten them with imposing papers and threats. It's a Victorian police force; it peers out of musty windows and wants to inquire about everything, and can make crimes if the crimes don't exist to its satisfaction. "Nine lines of crime and one of boredom," said Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

It is for reasons such as these that the Beat Generation is against law enforcement. Those laws that are enforced by political parties also inhibit the beatnik in his search for "self," and hence this is taboo.

The form of government that the Beat Generation prefers is anarchism. The organic community should be a community of love—a community held together by an all-prevading Eros wherein each citizen would have a deep concern for the welfare of his fellow man, yet, not to the extent that such a concern would stifle full development of the "I".

It is felt that love is the key to the solution of international and intranational conflicts. This opinion is held by the Square also, but there is little effort to put it into practice. The Beat men want to love everybody,

"Even the haters and the war-makers—on both sides of the iron curtain. And maybe if they can love enough, and put it into their poems and paintings, maybe it'll spread out like. And if enough of them make it that way and it helped to transform a few people here

1 Ibid., p. 56.

2 Ibid., p. 113.
and a few people there, then somebody on this side is going to refuse to make their fuckin bombs for them, and somebody on the other side is going to refuse to fire their missles—"1

Very little is mentioned in the literature of the Beat Generation as far as politics is concerned. This fact may be regarded as an indication of the lack of interest or as an indication of the non-importance of politics. That which is mentioned is always derogatory, reflecting the corruptness of our system. In Ginsberg's "Howl," one gets a clear picture of the attitude of the Beat Generation toward the American political system, toward

...the United States that coughs all night and won't let us sleep...2


CHAPTER III

RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHIC ATTITUDES

In an age such as ours, it is not difficult to be drawn from belief in the Supreme Being because of our apparent prosperity. It is sometimes difficult for the church to provide the explanations that are needed in a complex world such as we have in the twentieth century, and many times there is a tendency to accept things as being "the will of God," thus feeling that no explanation is needed. "Orthodox religious conceptions of good and evil seem increasingly inadequate to explain a world of science-fiction turned fact, past-enemies turned bosom-friend, and honorable-diplomacy turned brink-of-war."¹ In addition to these inadequacies, the Beat Generation criticizes the church for its facile moralizing, race prejudice, and popular credulity—things which they are justified in criticizing. The attitude of the generation in re the church is one of disaffiliation. This is not to imply that it does not believe in God, for Kerouac has stated that the Beat Generation is basically a religious one which believes in God.

"No one can tell us that there is no God. We've passed through all forms. ...Everything is fine, God exists, we know time...."²

The disaffiliation of the generation is a rejection of the values of

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all organized religions; it is anti-clerical. Though many of them embrace Catholicism, it is a Catholicism that can never be proclaimed as dogma or belief. Many of them are agnostic, living in a constant search for a natural, not a supernatural, god; they are searching and waiting for God to show them His face.

The beatniks have less concern for the organized church because their interest lies mainly in the private life—love, personal relations, problems of the self. "Life is a choice between boredom and kicks. A kick is anything that stimulates sensation and therefore enables one to get into contact with others. The great thing is contact, communication, intimacy, sex, and let the rest of the world go by." This outlook on life implies a certain primitivism—an uninhibited effort to return to the primal unit regardless of social taboos. Emphasis is placed upon an accentuated predominance of emotional life. There is an exaltation of the state of life in which man gets away from the complexities of society, and lives according to the dictates of his conscious. The impulse underlying this primitivism is to escape from the corrupt and sophisticated civilization that now characterizes our nation. However, there is no attempt on the part of the beatniks to reform such a civilization by bringing it into conformity with this ideal of simplicity.

The Beat Generation's worship of primitivism and spontaneity is more than a cover for their way of life; it arises from a pathetic poverty of

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3 Norman Podhoretz, "Where is the Beat Generation Going?" Esquire, I, No. 6 (December, 1958), 144.
feeling as well. This attitude toward primitivism is neither a mere revolt against anything so sociological and historical as the middle class; rather, it is the revolt of the spiritual underprivileged and the crippled soul—of

...Young men who can't think straight and so hate anyone who can; young men who can't get outside the morass of self and so construct definitions of feeling that exclude all human beings who manage to live, even miserably, in a world of objects; young men who are burdened unto death with the specially poignant sexual anxiety that America--in its eternal promise of erotic possibility--seems bent on breeding, and who therefore dream of the unattainable perfect orgasm, which excuses all sexual failure in the real world.\(^1\)

Such an attitude is justifiable, for before the 1950's mankind had been forced to live with the suppressed knowledge that the most minute facet of our personality, or the most minor projection of our ideas could mean that we might still be doomed to die as a cipher in some vast statistical operation. In an economic civilization based upon the belief that time can be subjected to our will, our psyche was subjected to the unbearable anxiety that death being causeless, life was causeless as well, and time deprived of cause and effect had come to a stop.\(^2\)

The aim of the Beat Generation in accepting this new primitivism is "to encourage the psychopath in the individual, to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention...."\(^3\)

Out of this condition has grown the existentialist--one who has

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3 Ibid., p. 344.
accepted the terms of death, divorced himself from society, chosen to live without roots and to live entirely according to the dictates of self. Such is the philosophy that must be accepted when one has lost faith in the past and future, and has accepted a life of non-conformity. Existentialism is the philosophy which declares as its first principle that existence is prior to essence.¹ This philosophy is the answer to the cries of the Beat Generation—cries that come from men and women who have lost something that they once believed in—be it a crude and false faith or a genuine faith,—of men and women who are living with no hope and without God, for it is He whom they are seeking. In order to be existentialist, the beatnik must be able to feel himself, to know his desires, rages and anguish. He must be aware of the character of his frustration and know what will satisfy it. He must be religious with an awareness of or a sense of "purpose."²

The Beat Generation feels that a life based upon primitivism and existentialism is a life that will bring one closer to the secrets of that inner unconscious life which will nourish one if one can hear it, for then nearer to that God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body, that trapped, mutilated and none the less megalomaniacal God who is the God of the churches but the unachievable whisper of mystery within the sex, the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm.³

This philosophy, which the Beat Generation feels will return us to the

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² Norman Mailer, op. cit., p. 346.

³ Ibid., p. 356.
primal unit, is only an affirmation of the barbarian. Such a philosophy, stressing that individual acts of violence are preferred to collective violence of the State, requires a primitive passion in re human nature. Such a philosophy, stressing acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth, requires a literal faith in the possibilities of the human being.

The existentialism of the Beat Generation promotes sexual promiscuity, though it is to have a more profound basis than one would think. To the Beat, sex is where philosophy begins. In Norman Mailer's *The Deer Park*, God, the oldest of the philosophers, is endowed with these words, "Rather think of Sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits." Sidney Alexander interprets this statement as an implication that the Diety is a Master Electrician, and when one is seiged by sex, he is just being hooked up.¹ There are those among the beatniks who are equally enthusiastic about both sexes, though they claim there is a difference between bisexuality and homosexuality. This attitude is based upon Gide's *Corydon*, in which the author supports the thesis that "some over-endowed men turn to other men after their women are exhausted--precisely out of masculine supavirility."² To the beatnik, performance in sex is the main thing--"performance and 'good orgasms,' which are the first duty of man and the only duty of woman."³


The use of narcotics is a common practice among members of the Beat Generation. Through the use of alcohol and drugs, the members are able to live in the immediate present, digging everybody and everything around them.

The Negro has been accused of giving rise to the hipster or the existentialist. Regardless of the authenticity of this opinion, many beatniks find the source of all vitality and virtue in the simple and rural types and in the dispossessed urban groups. These people are more interesting than the Squares, for the respectability that is demanded by the Square is a sign of spiritual death. Because of the social status of the lower class Negro, in relation to society, he must constantly live in a state of fear, and as a result, he has to live only for the present. Even today, the Beat Generation sees in him a trace of primitivism, hence they are sympathetic toward him.

In his search for self the beatnik explores all possibilities of achieving his end, and all means of justifying these possibilities. He sees in Zen Buddhism, along with primitivism an existentialism, certain factors that will aid him in his spiritual quest. "Zen is an ancient Chinese technique of mind-breaking discipline aimed at freeing the will." It is a religion based to an extent upon enlightenment or awakening, and consists of an unorthodox blend of anti-rational metaphysics, Buddhist religion, and psychotherapy. The anti-rational element enters in the belief that there is a hidden truth which lies deep within our consciousness. Zen aims to discover this truth through the process of meditation.


The religious element found in Zen Buddhism is the spiritual enlightenment or enhancement of the whole life of the individual who has experienced satori, an intuitive rather than an analytical grasp of the nature of things. In contrast with conventional religion, Zen attains its goal without a concern for such matters as faith, God, grace, sin, salvation, future life, etc., for it is nontheological and nonecclesiastic. Zen Buddhism is therapeutic in that it offers a point of view in which life takes on a fresher, deeper, and more satisfying aspect - a life where tensions and anxiety are replaced by contentment and serenity.¹

The Beat Generation finds in Zen Buddhism "a credo and a method for an age of conflict. It helps them to rediscover the 'essence' which has been suppressed by the rank materialism and religious indifference of our time," a time in which Christianity has fallen into the hands of a bourgeoisie that is anti-intellectual and anti-creative. This religion, Zen, allows for direct apprehension of truth. Tingesten states that the following factors or Zen truths have induced the Beat Generation to throw over its Western heritage and embrace this Oriental religion. First, Zen is not concerned with morality, for it teaches the relativity of good and evil. Second, faith is rejected as a path to truth, and emphasis is placed upon the theory that no being can save another; that the understanding of the ultimate essence of life is an incommunicable personal experience. Third, Zen believes neither in one God, nor in a multitude of gods but in a pantheistic, all-pervading essence. Fourth, Zen teaches that nothing phenomenal really exists but that everything is actually the void.²


Zen, then, justifies the Beat Generation's rejection of past and future, for a cardinal principle of the religion is the understanding of the eternal now. He who understands the present already lives in eternity.¹

Many critics, however, feel that the Beat Generation does not really understand the true nature of Zen Buddhism.

Because Zen truly surpasses convention and its values, it has no need to say "To hell with it," nor to underline with violence the fact that anything goes.²

Beat Zen has been called a "goofball," for it makes kicks possible for the generation. It is used chiefly to justify a revival of the fantasy.³ Though this is partially true, there is probably a deeper significance for the adaptation of this religion.

The love of fantasy which Zen encourages is seen in many novels of the Beat Generation. In On The Road, several characters engage in an effort "to communicate with absolute honesty and absolute completeness"⁴ all that is on their minds. This dialogue from the novel The Beat Generation is an illustration of the influence of Zen Buddhism; it also illustrates how the practice has been misunderstood.

...Stan chose a place to seat himself in the fashion of Buddha. Striking a similar pose, Jester asked in a hushed voice, "We are going to have a mutual vision?"

"Yes. Forget the world. Think only my thoughts.... To be yourself, you must first be me.... After you pass through the stage of being me, you will be totally yourself."⁵

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¹ Ibid.
⁵ Zugsmith, op. cit., p. 56.
Such attempts at meditation, a practice of Zen Buddhism, are not made with the depth of sincerity as found in the practice of Zen Buddhists—the true Zen Buddhists.¹

Primitivism, existentialism, and Zen Buddhism are the philosophic and religious concepts which the Beat Generation has substituted for the orthodox Christianity which they feel has been corrupted in twentieth century America. Perhaps these are particularly appealing to the group in that they encourage the beatniks in their search for "self," and justify the folkways and mores of this rebellious group.

¹ Read Kerouac’s The Dharma Bums for a first hand account of the Beat Generation and Zen Buddhism.
CHAPTER IV

AESTHETIC ATTITUDES

San Francisco, the home of the Beats, is presently the seat of an intense movement in painting and literature, and of an intense interest in that phase of music known as jazz. Though this new movement is sometimes considered as a degradation of our artistic heritage, it is just as much a reproduction of its authors as Greek or Egyptian art is a reproduction of its authors. The chief function of any art is that of expression, and the chief ends have been to instruct and delight. The Beat Generation is concerned with another end of art in relation to society—transformation. Their aim is not merely to instruct or entertain, but to arouse some type of pleasant emotional response which makes for an association between the audience and the work. It is only after transformation has taken place that one can see that art may be therapeutic in nature.

The art of the San Francisco renaissance is distinct in that it marks a return to the true nature of art, which is an expression of feelings regardless of steadfast rules.

The Beat Generation is particularly interested in jazz because it "is primarily the music of inner freedom, of improvisation, of the creative individual rather than the interpretative group. It is the music of a submerged people who feel free...." Lipton states that jazz, to the


beatnik, is therapeutic as well as a sacred ritual and a music of protest. It is therapeutic, and becomes so in connection with the sexual act. Such an affiliation tends to free the listener from his inhibitions. This is something that the Square rejects, and in sex, the beatnik finds him to be "angular and rigid, awkward and guilt-laden."

Their arms are knives, their fingers all nails. When they try to make love they hurt each other.

They torture themselves with shame and with pride, With time clocks and unattainable ambitions.

They drag themselves over miles of broken glass And stone themselves with false confessions.¹

Jazz is sacred ritual
...when it raises sex to the level of the sacre, holy, which in turn means wholeness, integration. It is a sacrament when it is socially responsible, when it has the force of an oath between lovers. It becomes sacrilege when it is stolen out of its hierogamic context and used for profit, violence, rape.²

It is difficult to see the religious element in the sexual promiscuity of the Beat Generation, though not so difficult to see the part that jazz plays as an accompaniment to the sexual act.

The Beat Generation looks upon jazz as a music of social protest—not as a solution to any social problem, for they are apolitical, but as a kind of relief. The mere existence of jazz to them is regarded as a fight against the "cultured" or "refined" music of the concert halls which are frequented by the Square. "They see it pitting its spontaneous, improvised, happy, sad, angry-loving, ecstatic on-the-spot creativity"³ against the


³ Ibid., pp. 212-213.
music of such as the New York Symphony Orchestra, music that to them is dead.

It is a common practice of the beatniks to gather in a "pad" or a "joint" and smoke pot while "digging" jazz. To them, this constitutes the most favorite form of recreation - an act that is religious, therapeutic, and rebellious.

The poetry of the Beat Generation marks a complete revolution in the basic trend of American verse. The new group of young poets in San Francisco feels that "only that which cries to be said, no matter how 'unpoetic' it may seem; only that which is unalterably true to the sayer, and bursts out of him in a flood, finding its own form as it comes, is worth the saying in the first place."\(^1\) This suggests that no regard should be held for literary attitudes, meter, grammar—all that is self-conscious, artificial, for these concerns separate literature from life. This concept of poetry is much like that held by the Romantic poets of England and America in the nineteenth century.

The foremost of the poets of "the new violence" is Allen Ginsberg, whose most outstanding poem is "Howl." This is a poem that flings cusses at the American Squares. Though it cannot be considered as rational discourse, it is definitely "the fury of the soul injured lover or child, and its dynamic lies in the way it spews up undigested the elementary need for freedom of sympathy, for generous exploration of thought, for the open response of man to man so long repressed by smooth machinery of intellectual distortion."\(^2\)

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This excerpt suggests the general nature of the subject matter and style of the poem as well as the attitude of the generation:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night, who poverty and tatters and holloweyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,

who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard wandering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts,

who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to converse about America and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so took ship to Africa,

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination? Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unattainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairway! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks! Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judge of men! Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of Sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments! Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!...

This is a reflection of the total disgust that the Beat Generation feels toward our twentieth century America. The complete poem is an extreme protest of the group.

Dan Jacobson feels that Ginsberg has rhythm and a feeling for the

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value of words, but lacks the ability "to write a poem which can stand up to any but a sympathetic examination." Yet critics feel in many instances that his style shows a great influence of such poets as Whitman, Williams, and Fearing in his adaptation of cadence to rhetorical and colloquial rhythms. Regardless of the many faults of his poem, Ginsberg

...has brought a terrible psychological reality to the surface with enough originality to blast American verse a hair's-breadth forward in the process. And he has sent up a rocket-flare to locate for his readers the particular inferior of his "lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon, all of them yacketa-yacking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of hospital jails and wars."2

The poetry of the Beat Generation in general shows an influence of such poets as Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Poe, Rimbaud, Yeats, Eliot, Pound and many others. All of these poets were not poets who adhered to any steadfast rules, but who remained true to the self. In all poetry, the Beats strive to be frank, concise, reverent. They picture things as they are and have a high regard for the sense of the absurd.

The prose of the Beat Generation is less highly developed than its poetry. Kerouac, the best novelist in the genre, has published several books, most of them differing in style. He states that his

...position in the current American literary scene is simply that [he] got sick and tired of the conventional English sentence which seemed to [him] so ironbound in its rules, so inadmissible with reference to the actual format of [his] mind as [he] had learned to probe it in the modern spirit of Freud and Jung, that [he] couldn't express [himself] through that form anymore.3

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1 Dan Jacobson, "America's 'Angry Young Men,'" Commentary, XXIV (December, 1957), 476.

2 Rosenthal, op. cit., p. 162

He feels that in writing, one should adhere to his thoughts, and to the words that produced the thoughts. This, to him is literature - a reproduction of the individual. Just as in poetry, there should be no regard for craft, for it is merely "laborious and dreary lying," a "sheer blockage of the mental spontaneous process known 2,500 years ago as 'The Seven Streams of Swiftness.'"

In re style, the aim of the prose writers is more than an attempt to be different and new. This style is one that stems naturally from their way of life - to which they strive to remain true. The Beats attempt always to present a "smog-free vision of life." In their prosaic style, writers of the generation have been influenced by such novelists as James Joyce, Henry Miller, Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, and others. Most of the characters in the novels may be called "Forthright Brutes," characters who are "bewitched boys, newly discovering verbs and nouns, physical sensation, zip-pow-wham of weather, drink, sex,..., balls."

In its life, as reflected in its literature, the Beat Generation has developed a new language which is quite unique. Norman Mailer has stated that "what makes it a special language is that it cannot really be taught—if one shares none of the experience of elation and exhaustion which it is equipped to describe, then it seems merely arch or vulgar or irritating." What seems to be so strange about this new language is the fact that it allows one to say much without really saying anything. For

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1 Ibid.
example, the term "yes" covers a wider field than any dictionary. "With it" means that one understands what is happening. A "pad" is a home; a "joint" is a place, a penis, or a stick of marijuana; a "spade cat" is a Negro. These are a few of the many terms that constitute hip language.

There have been attempts made by sociologists to find the psychological basis for this new language. One sociologist of Temple University views the language as a symbol of withdrawal.

"These young people...are using their rather odd form of speech to establish an identity of their own. They are growing up in a time of upheaval where the mores we have always regarded as sacred seem to be leading us to destruction. They have lost respect for the home as a unit of solidarity. They see international politics as two and three-faced bargain counters. They have a need to believe in something and the adult world offers them cliches and guided missiles. So they have decided to go at it alone and their language is merely to separate them from the common world of words and ideas—a world they find false and insecure."¹

This new language expresses contempt for rational discourse, which is to the beatnik a form of death because it is a product of the mind. If one is articulate, he has no feeling, for feelings cannot be expressed in syntactical language. To be articulate suggests an inability to respond to anything and an impotency.²

As for the subject matter of the literature of the Beat Generation, it must not be considered obscene. In the decision of Judge Clayton W. Horn, "Howl" was declared not to be obscene for

"Life is not encased in one formula whereby everyone acts the same or conforms to a particular pattern. No two persons act alike. We are all made from the same mould, but in different patterns. Would there be any freedom of press or speech if one must reduce his vocabulary to vapid innocuous euphemisms? An author should be real in


treating his subject and be allowed to express his thoughts and ideas in his own words."¹

This is also the attitude of the Beat Generation writers, and this they have done. In light of this, authorities have agreed that for literature to be judged obscene in California, "it must present a 'clear and present danger of inciting to anti-social or immoral action.'"²

The Beat Generation, besides improvising the literary genres that are current on the literary scene of America, have created a new genre known as jazz poetry. It is the reciting of poetry to the music of a jazz band, a process that is not as simple as it seems. In this genre, the voice is integrally blended with the music and is treated as another instrument, with its solo and ensemble passages and those of the instruments.³

The purpose of this new genre is to restore poetry to its ancient role as a "socially functional art allied with music in a single, reinte- grated form."⁴ It is felt that poetry as an art is dying out in twentieth century America, and that a blending of poetry and jazz will return the poet to his audience.

Among those of the Beat Generation who are interested in the arts, painting is regarded as a part of "making the scene." To them, painting is any work from a sketchbook of pen and pencil drawings to oils. As in its literature, these young people insist upon spontaneity in painting, and those painters most respected by them are those who use an intuitive

¹ Quoted in Feldman and Gartenberg, op. cit., p. 164.


approach in their work. Such painters as Mark Tobey, Clayton Price, Rice
Lebrum, Ben Shaw, and Robert Motherwell have had tremendous influence upon
the painters of the generation.

In literature and painting, then, the Beat men and women desire to be
freed from steadfast rules, and to rely upon the dictates of the conscious.
They seek to express their inner feelings in the terms which present them,
for only then is art related to life. This inner freedom is found in jazz,
and it is for this reason that the generation caters to this phase of the
universal language, music.
CONCLUSION

After a consideration of the social, political, religious and philosophic, and the aesthetic attitudes of the Beat Generation, one is inclined to feel that the beatniks of America are not as radical as has often been the conclusion of many Squares. He is inclined to feel that the beat way of life is the only way of life thus far that these young men and women have found to be an adequate adaptation to the progressivism which characterizes our nation. This way of life, or the attitudes of the generation, admittedly, are quite disturbing to an individual who has always sought and is still seeking a life of security by conforming to social standards and patterns. But those of the Beat Generation have realized that this way of life is one that stifles complete maturation of individuality, and hence is not good.

The image of the Beat Generation is found in the late James Dean, an actor of the discipline known as The Method. The primary concern of this method is to find the essence or soul of a character. The beatniks view Dean as an individual who lived

...intensely in alternate explosions of tenderness and violence; eager for love and a sense of purpose, but able to accept them only on terms which acknowledged the facts of life as he knew them...

Dean, like the Beats, was always "on the road" in search of something—going sans a sense of direction or purpose.

Generally there are valid reasons for one to reject the mores of our

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nation and to accept those of the Beat Generation. Is not there evidence enough to justify a disaffiliation from the ways of life of Square? There is a corruption in all of the values that are supposedly held by the intellectuals of America, and these values are in many instances pseudo values. Nor can this generation be blamed for rejecting the past and future, and adopting existentialism and Zen Buddhism as a philosophic basis for their lives. How is one to live when he is in a state of constant fear of death as a result of his own creations? Rejection of the organized church is justifiable also, for even the Square must admit that the church, as a whole, is losing its potency, and has failed to cope adequately with the problems of a world such as ours.

That which is more difficult to accept is the attitude of the Beat Generation toward the family, for this institution has always served as a "training ground" for young people. The loss of respect for the family which characterizes the generation is dangerous, for, without the family as we have known it, how can one learn to adapt to life in a society-at-large? This has reference to the off-spring of the group, for, doubtedly, those attitudes of the generation will not necessarily be accepted by generations to come. Nor have they enough potency to become characteristic of our nation as a whole. If this is true, how will the off-spring of the beatniks be able to function in a democracy, be it a pseudo-democracy?

The problems that the Beat Generation presents are not as simple as Dan Wakefield suggests when he states that "...there are born each year a certain number of men and a certain number of boys;...out of each era in our national history there come a few poets and a few boys wandering with words. ..."\(^1\) The members of the Beat Generation are not necessarily boys

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because they have chosen a way of life that differs drastically from the expected. These young men and women are human beings whom the nation has failed to help adjust to or find their places in our society. And this fact is a serious one in relation to our destiny.

The problems are more serious when we realize that not only is there such a group as the Beat Generation in America. In many countries there are similar groups of young people who are growing up with a new social outlook and new patterns of behavior. In France, they are existentialists; in England, The Angry Young Men. It is frightening to think of a world that is governed by the standards of groups such as these, but, according to some members of the group, such may be the case.

"I prophesy," says Kerouac, "that the Beat Generation, which is supposed to be nutty nihilism in the guise of new hipness, is going to be the most sensitive generation in the history of America and therefore it can't help but be good."\(^1\)

This indicates the depth of sincerity that these beatniks hold in their ideas and ideals. The guardians of our civilization must take an active part in helping these young people to solve their problems. But, as Podhoretz has stated, if the guardians allow themselves to be intimidated by the attitudes of the Beat Generation, its culture will eventually affect politics, for "...what begins as culture always ends in politics."\(^2\)

This is among the greatest threats of the Beat Generation.


\(^2\) Norman Podhoretz, "Where is the Beat Generation Going?" Esquire, L, No. 6 (December, 1958), 150.
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